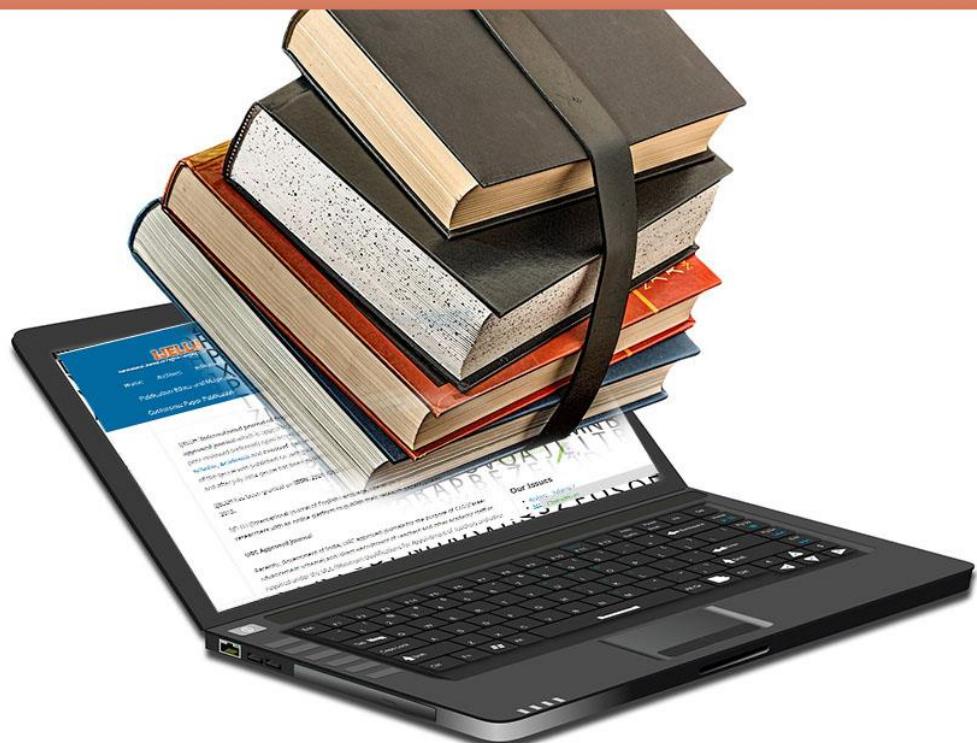


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Confronting Marginalisation: Role of Swami Anandatheerthan in the Education Progress of North Malabar

Abstract

Swami Anandatheerthan has a prominent place among the social reformers of Kerala, especially North Malabar. His efforts mainly focused on the upliftment of Harijans in the society. The reform activities of Swami Anandatheerthan had paved way for many drastic social changes in the society of Malabar. This paper is trying to trace out the distinct identity of Anandatheerthan and his contributions towards the educational development of North Malabar.

Key Words: North Malabar, Harijans, Social Reformer

Today, we are going through a social situation in which humanism and renaissance values face strong challenges. Customs and rituals have already swallowed our society reaffirming the thoughts on caste and religion. The renaissance leaders have played a key role in paving a way for us to question the defects of existing social systems and to welcome the new ones.

The Dalit, who are the basic sections of the society were the ones who suffered most due to the caste system. Therefore, many people came forward for their upliftment. Swami Anandatheerthan was a rare personality who proved that giving them education was the best way to instil in them thoughts and actions against caste system. Historically it is indeed a noble duty to democratise a caste based society. Swamiji worked untiringly to form a society that gives importance to democratic values instead of the corrupted social values of caste.

The disheartening picture of denying education to the Dalit children in ordinary schools was the inspiration for Swami to start a school of their own. In Palakkad Sabari Ashram Muslim children had the permission to study together with the children from all castes. Similarly, the Sradhananda School in Payyoli was an institution that adopted and took care of *Pulaya* children. The experience of serving in these institutions for some time and the inspiration from Rajagopalachary motivated Swamiji to establish an educational institution in Payyanur named as Sree Narayana School. (M.S.Nair,2006;154)

This type of schools became a necessity in the context of the high caste elites protesting against their children studying with the children belonging to scheduled castes and tribes. According to swamiji, high caste Hindus have to give up their elitist mentality in order to help the economically and culturally backward people to overcome their inferiority complex. Keeping this target in mind, swamiji established a school named Sree Narayana School near Payyanur Subrahmanya Swami Temple on November 21, 1931 by enrolling six children as inmates.(Abraham Ayrookuzhiyil,1987;34-36)

Spiritual and physical discipline is necessary for social egalitarianism. By way of a planned action for the eradication of untouchability, simultaneously as the war against untouchability was going on in one side, Anandatheerthan revived the educational institution

known as Sree Narayana School spending the money obtained by selling his property. (Ashraf,2003;41-42)

V. Chandrashekharan Vaidyar, president of Swami Anadatheertha Trust, explains the historical background of Anandatheerthan establishing the Sree Narayana School: Swami had established schools and hostels in many places to educate the children of low castes, to inculcate in them the habit of self-reliance and to recognize the human potentials. This institution that educates the students in the model of Sabarmathi Ashram by providing them accommodation is its broad step. Having sought for and identified the children belonging to the sections of Pulaya, Paniya and Mavilan, Swami himself took intense efforts to educate and provide them higher education and career. Many people who have been educated here are working as higher officials in many parts of Kerala. The ashram in Payyanur became the centre of attraction and the source of energy for the then national leaders and freedom fighters. Important persons like V. V. Giri, Dr. Rajendraprasad, Jayaprakash Narayan, Shankar Vasudev, Natarajaguru and so on have visited this place and admired the services of Swami. (Ashraf,2003;43)

There wasn't any place for casteism in this school which was established for the purpose of providing education, food and shelter to the poor children especially those who are denied education and to instil in them the sense of cleanliness and the habit of self-reliance. Swamiji changed the students' names that signified their identity as belonging to the low castes. He gave them names that the high caste use such as Subrahmanyam, Prabhakaran, Prabhu, Sharma, Marar, Nambyar and so on. (M.S.Nair,2006;155)This was the beginning a religious revolution to lead the neglected sections towards the mainstream of the society.

Basal Mission School in Payyanur was the first battle field of Swamiji to end the discrimination against the *harijan* children. The headmaster of this school was a person who

was converted from *Pulaya* community to Christianity. He was unwilling to admit the *harijan* children to school fearing that the parents of high caste students may protest. But, Mr. Karl Stone who was the sub collector of Thalassery issued a special order to admit the children. The sub-collector also instructed the headmaster not to grant transfer certificate to any children if they ask for it due to this reason. This was the first achievement of Swamiji. This inspired him to build up an institution of this sort. Swamiji was able to overcome the similar situations in Madayi School near Pazhayangadi, Varanamkode School near Payyanur, etc.(Abraham Ayrookuzhiyil,1987;38-39)

Besides Sree Narayana School, he established Sree Narayana Hostels in Pazhayangadi, Kannur, Kalyassery and Thalassery and provided residential facilities to *harijan* children. Swamiji succeeded in enrolling the children in the common schools in these respective places also.(Abraham Ayrookuzhiyil,1987;37)

Jubilee Memorial School established in Kanool of Kannur District is most important in his efforts to educate the lower sections. (Mohandas,2006;16) Another remarkable effort of Swamiji in connection with the educational progress of *harijan* students was related to the primary school in Kalyassery. Even national leaders like K.Kelappan, C. F. Andrews and so on came in person and supported Swamiji's efforts against denying admission in this school to a *harijan* student named Sumukhan.(Thomas .T.M,1995;11) Mahatma Gandhi visited Sree Narayana School on 12th January 1934 and planted a mango tree in its vicinity.(Gopakumar.P.F,2015;246) The mortal remains of Swami Anandatheerthan rest in the shade of this tree known as “*Gandhimavu*”.(Abraham Ayrookuzhiyil,1987;41)

What distinguishes a highly qualified Ananda Shenai - turned-Swami Anandatheerthan, from other renaissance leaders of north Malabar is his desire and willingness to be a refuge to the lower sections. His contributions to uplift the weaker sections of the society had a great

influence in the social reformations of North Malabar. The biography of similar socially committed persons should be a lesson to the new generation.

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